

College merger tweet shock

Chris Henwood
@Chris_Henwood

Bosses at a college in the Midlands claim they found out about two competitors' multi-million pound merger plan — which is being investigated over procedural concerns — thanks to a local newspaper "tweet".

Plans for Stourbridge and Birmingham Metropolitan Colleges to form "one of the largest and most significant further education providers in the country" allegedly came to the attention of Sandwell College via social media.

The plans are the subject of a Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) investigation "to establish if appropriate processes have been followed" and have been described as "rushed" by the University and College Union (UCU).

Dudley, and Birmingham Met said they had followed procedure "in accordance with the recommended guidelines and relevant regulations". The plan has already won the approval of the Birmingham LEP.

But Nick Varney, UCU regional official, said: "Questions have to be asked about how the colleges' management have arrived at this rushed merger."

"We would like to see the two go back to the drawing board, but this time be open with information and give staff, students and anyone else affected the opportunity for genuine consultation."

Just last month FE Minister Matthew Hancock issued guidance to all principals and governors on such merger plans, without referring to either college.

A spokesperson for Dudley College called on the colleges to follow the



Dudley College has also questioned whether the merger was "necessarily in the best interest of local learners", and the Black Country local enterprise partnership (LEP) has called for more clarification on the proposals.

Meanwhile, Sandwell College — no more than 13 miles from Stourbridge or Birmingham Met — put together its response on the plan having, it claimed, having learned about it on Twitter.

A spokesperson said: "We became aware of the proposed merger via a tweet by a local newspaper during the Christmas holidays. We had not received any notification of an intent, or need, to merge prior to that."

The proposals would dissolve the 12,500-student Stourbridge College on May 31, with its property, rights and liabilities transferring to Birmingham Met, which had more than 26,000 learners two years ago. A six-week formal consultation on the plan, which the colleges say would create "an enhanced learning experience and increased employment opportunities for students," ended on Wednesday, February 27.

A joint statement from Stourbridge, which is in the borough of

Minister's directions "more closely".

He said: "It's difficult to understand from the consultation document, as published, why this merger is required and how it is necessarily in the best interest of local learners."

"We would certainly encourage the two colleges to follow more closely direction to the sector."

"Many stakeholders in Dudley, including Dudley College, have called for greater consultation and an open and transparent process to select a merger partner, if the dissolution of Stourbridge College really is required."

A spokesperson for the Black Country LEP, which covers Stourbridge, said: "We would seek clarification in certain areas relating to the proposed merger, particularly its aims and objectives, the process of consultation, demonstration of economic benefit and lack of guarantees regarding the future of Black Country facilities."

"Having sought this clarification, we would wish to work closely with the new college, should the merger go ahead."

Stourbridge and Birmingham Met's joint statement said: "The



Bird's eye view of the catwalk

Lincolnshire students got the chance to strut their stuff when their college brought a little bit of London Fashion Week to town.

Hairdressing students at North Lindsey College, in Scunthorpe, were tasked with designing hair, make-up and costumes to illustrate a chosen theme for a contest judged by lecturer Hazel Wheatley and local experts Sarah Cockin and Julie Joyce.

The level one winner, Emily Bushell, 17, created a peacock look for Laura Richardson, 18 (pictured above). She said she wanted to base her design around a bird whose "vibrant colours" she had always loved.

Other entries included designs inspired by Salvador Dali, an African warrior, a parrot and Alice in Wonderland.

More on pages 10-13

board and senior team at Stourbridge have been considering various strategic options for a considerable time.

"All processes and due diligence have been carried out under the guidance of our independent professional advisers in accordance with the recommended guidelines and relevant

regulations.

"We have been in direct dialogue with all interested parties which include our recognised unions, parents, students and businesses. The feedback from the majority of them has been very positive."

Editor's comment page 4

Monday, March 4, 2013
www.feweek.co.uk

Graham Hoyle to step down



Page 4

Angel O'Donoghue interview



Page 5

The first FE Insider column



Page 6

Sixth Form Colleges Association



Pages 8 & 9

inside...

Edition 58

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Deadline 'degrades' ILRs

Eleanor Radford

@EleanorRadford

The Association of Colleges (AoC) believes that the data quality of Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returns could be "degraded" by moving the final return deadline forward three weeks.

Julian Gravatt, assistant chief executive at the AoC, spoke out after the Information Authority's (IA) board, with support from FE Minister Matthew Hancock, agreed a new deadline for ILR returns 2012/13 of the third week of October.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) argued that earlier data, used to ensure public money is spent in line with government targets, would help the FE sector in public spending negotiations.

But Mr Gravatt said that earlier return dates could "well result in degradation to the quality of the data collected, raise the cost of collection as more staff are required, and create confusion".

He said that the "preferred option" was a phased introduction that would have been brought in toward 2015.

BIS's initial consultation with providers in November on a proposed data deadline of September 27 — seven weeks earlier than the current deadline — angered the sector.

FE Week reported in December that just 2 per cent of providers supported a September deadline. Concerns among the 612 responses included "putting put pressure on staff" and "less rigorous and less robust data".

Mr Gravatt said: "The consultation on the

change carried out by the IA attracted a large number of responses, many of which voiced serious concern.

"If it has been decided centrally that this is needed, colleges will rise to the challenge," he said. "This is yet another example of how the sector has to answer to changes and pressure brought in from the top down with little supportive evidence. The proposed change to the submission date for ILR data has been approved by ministers and now colleges must work within this new framework."

The date for returns has been creeping forward for a number of years. Until 2006/07, providers had to send data by the last Monday in March. Even after this date a provider could send revised data if some of it was inaccurate or incomplete.

But the date then moved to the third or fourth week of November — with no returns accepted after the deadline.

An IA spokesperson said: "The board recognised there was a strong case to do this [to change the date] and whilst it felt a September deadline would be difficult for providers to meet, a final return date of the third week in October for 2013 (similar to the schools census deadline) would be possible if help was given to overcome obstacles — such as operational issues."

The IA spokesperson said it had received 140 responses to a further consultation it put out in the new year on what would make it easier for providers to meet an earlier final return date.

A Skills Funding Agency spokesperson said it "wasn't in a position to share details" of the consultation until after its next board meeting on Wednesday March 6.

FE Week news in brief

Dip in Neet numbers

The number of young people not in employment, education or training (Neet) in England has fallen slightly since this time last year.

Government figures show that in the last quarter of 2012, 893,000 16 to 24-year-olds were classified as Neet, down from 957,000 for the same period in 2011.

The number of 16 to 18-year-old Neets fell to 153,000, the lowest figure in more than a decade for the quarter.

FE visas plummet

The number of study visas issued for the FE sector fell 62 per cent in 2012 compared with 2011.

Data from the Office for National Statistics, published last week, showed FE visas were down to 31,587, and had dipped 15 per cent to 31 per cent of the total number of study visas.

Overall, study visas fell 20 per cent from 2011 to 209,804, but university visas for universities increased 3 per cent.

Prime guidance

Prime contractors have been issued new Skills Funding Agency guidance on second level subcontracting.

Written approval from the agency for such an arrangement is among the rules, published Thursday, February 28. Second level subcontractors must be declared and, said the agency on its website, "will only be allowed with express consent of the chief executive".

The agency may also "approach other providers that currently have or have previously had a declared relationship" with a subcontractor.

Guild consultation ends

Rebecca Cooney

@AnyNameButBecky

The FE Guild project leader has described responses to a consultation on the proposed organisation as "positive and constructive".

Peter Davies CBE said written responses and contributions from 12 consultation events, were "useful".

The consultation, which ended last Monday, initially triggered concerns that providers would struggle to meet the three-week deadline.

But Mr Davies said he was pleased with the range of responses, although the results were not yet available.

"Overall, I found each of the consultation events to be very positive and constructive, and will definitely be most useful in shaping the way forward," he said.

"I would like to thank everyone who took the time to share their views... in what we realise was a limited timescale."

He added: "We set ourselves the aim of trying to ensure all parts of this very diverse sector had the opportunity to engage in the guild consultation process.

"So it was pleasing to see people from all different provider types and organisations choosing to be involved in discussing the proposals."

In an earlier online questionnaire 50 per cent of respondents were broadly supportive of the idea of a guild, while 42 per cent said they were "ambivalent" until they knew more about the guild's remit. The consultation suggested the guild could take responsibility for defining standards and professionalism, and developing qualification frameworks. The key proposals suggest the guild will be a small team, funded initially by a direct grant with a view to self-funding in the future.

Online questionnaire respondents also queried the suitability of the title, an issue acknowledged in the formal consultation document.

Meanwhile, the steering group began its search for an interim chief executive for the guild's set-up, but an advert on the group's website said this was subject to a positive response to the consultation and ministerial approval.

"Our priority now is the full and robust analysis of the range of responses so that we can deliver our implementation plan by the end of March. We will start to provide some initial feedback in our blog and website when we've collated all the feedback," said Mr Davies.

He said anyone interested in the guild's development should check for updates on Twitter at @team_FEGuild, the website, www.feguild.info, and the blog at www.fe-guild.blogspot.co.uk

Top FE Tech tweets:



@matthancockmp

Hugely looking forward today to hosting the FE Learning Technology Action Group — on how to drive forward use of technology in FE



Paul Rolfe @psrolfe

Great and productive first meeting of @matthancockmp Learning Technology Action Group, some great ideas and lots of opportunities! #loveFE



@157lynne

@psrolfe @matthancockmp have heard good things from several people about the meeting, and that you made great contribution Paul, well done



@bobharrisonset

Interesting mix of public/private sector members @matthancockmp first ministerial task force on how FE can use technology more effectively



@MargueriteHogg

Inaugural FELTAG meeting with Minister @matthancockmp - technology and FE and skills pic.twitter.com/11cU0FMaan

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CELEBRATING OUR 10 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Minister holds FE technology roundtable

Rebecca Cooney

@AnyNameButBecky

Technology that can revolutionise FE learning was on the agenda at the first of a series of roundtable meetings hosted by FE Minister Matthew Hancock.

Sector experts were invited to the inaugural meeting of the FE Learning Technology Action Group last week by Mr Hancock, who chaired alongside education business leader and co-founder of Bleinhem Chalcot, Manoj Badale.

Mr Hancock described the meeting as "very productive. "I am very enthusiastic about the role technology can play — it's crucial this is sector-driven."

FE should look at the use of technology such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), gamification (using game-thinking to engage students), big data and flip teaching, he said.

Bob Harrison, Toshiba Information Systems education adviser and vice chair of Beacon status institution Northern College, was at the meeting and said it was an "exciting and positive development."

"We asked 'what barriers are stopping innovation in FE teaching and learning with technology?' We identified barriers around inspection, audit, lack of leadership and governance, but mainly funding methodology.

"It's about changing mindsets — we've got an analogue mindset in a digital world. Another three meetings are planned over the next year before the group reports its conclusions."

Dick Palmer, Gazelle Colleges Group's representative at the meeting, said: "It's a very interesting board, it's short, sharp and focused and could have real implications for the sector.

"It can't afford to be a policy statement describing what's going on — it's got to be something giving recommendations about embedding technological opportunities in learning paradigms."

Mr Harrison was also optimistic. "We've got a perfect storm in an area that's been neglected in FE and a minister who understands the potential of technology to transform learning — and the ministerial will to do something," he said.

For more information about learning technology, see our tech spread in last week's edition.

Hancock Q&A

Who did you invite to join the group?

As well as getting key players around the table, I wanted to invite people with enthusiasm for the role of technology so the group can trailblaze.

Over the past decade or more, government has tried big top-down interventions to get more technology into FE and hasn't covered itself in glory.

I want to do things the opposite way around, bring together thought leaders and make sure we're listening and responding in government rather than trying to do it on our own.

What are the benefits of more technology in the sector?

There's clear evidence technology can improve teaching and learning, and help colleges and providers deliver better learning in tight financial times or to reach people it's otherwise hard to reach.

The sector is seen as lagging behind technologically. Why is this?

There are all sorts of reasons why... my role is to instil enthusiasm and ensure government supports rather than constrains the use of new technology.

Technology is really a means to an end — what we want is better teaching.

So it's bigger than IT hardware. It's about teaching methods and how teachers interact. We need a response from the whole system, and representatives of almost the whole system were there, so hopefully this can energise and move things forward.

Have you seen this kind of technology in practice?

I have, yes — I took an online course myself over a decade ago although I haven't taken a MOOC as a route to a qualification yet.



Provider told 'no chance' of growth request

Chris Henwood

@Chris_Henwood

A training provider in the Midlands slashed its growth request by 75 per cent after local staff at the Skills Funding Agency said there was "no chance of putting forward any form of growth case for classroom-based provision for the unemployed".

Bosses at Leicester-based Skillspoint, which has around 450 learners in sectors including construction and logistics, now hope that the agency will increase their contract from £1.25m to £1.5m.

The firm had planned to ask for £1m, but decided to pass on the provision that the increase would have funded to other prime contractors after local agency staff said the request would fall on deaf ears.

It comes despite the agency saying nationally that some growth requests might win approval.

Skillspoint managing director Nic O'Donovan said: "We received correspondence from our agency relationship team that, despite being a priority for growth, there was 'no chance of putting forward any form of growth case for classroom-based provision for the unemployed'.

"They said this on the basis that it was highly unlikely there were sufficient funds in the system.

"So we knocked back about 75 per cent of our original growth request and brokered it out to other primes."

Agency guidance, dated January, indicated growth requests could win approval.

"Where funding allows, we will continue

to expand the offer to the unemployed and provide growth for apprenticeships where there is clear employer demand," it said.

The situation has led to confusion in the sector about growth requests and Mr O'Donovan said new guidance "might be helpful".

However, the agency declined to produce up-to-date information on the growth requests situation in light of the experience of providers such as Skillspoint. It reissued the guidance dated January.

Meanwhile, a spokesperson for the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP), which has been in talks with the agency on growth requests, said: "We understand some providers have still recently been told by agency relationship teams that some growth requests should not be put forward and would not be funded.

"We would like to reiterate that the agency has made it clear to us that all funding requests will be considered, subject to affordability."

An agency spokesperson said: "We will increase the funds needed to support the rate increases introduced for English and maths.

"The agency will also increase access for high quality apprenticeships where there is clear employer demand, and to support unemployed people back to work."

However, the AELP spokesperson said: "The current growth request issue has shown that demand for apprenticeships is not being fully met — that is why we are talking to the skills minister and the agency about it.

"But if the funding is more efficiently allocated to providers who can evidence demand, then there is no reason why growth in standalone NVQs and apprenticeships should be mutually exclusive."

The agency spokesperson added: "We continue to review performance of providers against their minimum contract value, through our published quarterly performance management arrangements."

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Editor's comment

Free to ask permission

Since coming to power, the coalition government has been at pains to introduce a range of FE policies that it says give colleges 'freedoms and flexibilities'.

And in his speech in January, FE Minister Matthew Hancock told college governors: "We removed a plethora of controls on college corporations to give colleges the freedom and flexibility to respond."

However, it is clear that governors are perhaps not as free from the politicians as you might think.

For example, last August when Lewisham College and Southwark College merged, Matthew Hancock was required to approve the college's new name (LeSoCo).

More recently, BIS has been investigating whether government consultation and competitive tendering procedures for mergers have been followed by Stourbridge College and Birmingham Metropolitan College.

Clearly accountability is key, but these two recent examples suggest the government has further to go if its actions are to match its words.

Ultimately, colleges governors have a responsibility to follow the rules, so FE Week will be watching Twitter and the case of Stourbridge College and Birmingham Metropolitan College with interest.

Nick Linford, editor

Correction

We do hope you're enjoying this copy of *FE Week*, dated Monday, March 4. It's edition number 58, don't you know.

This is something that has been checked, and checked again, and yes, it's definitely edition 58. We say this just in case you'd been led astray by the previous edition.

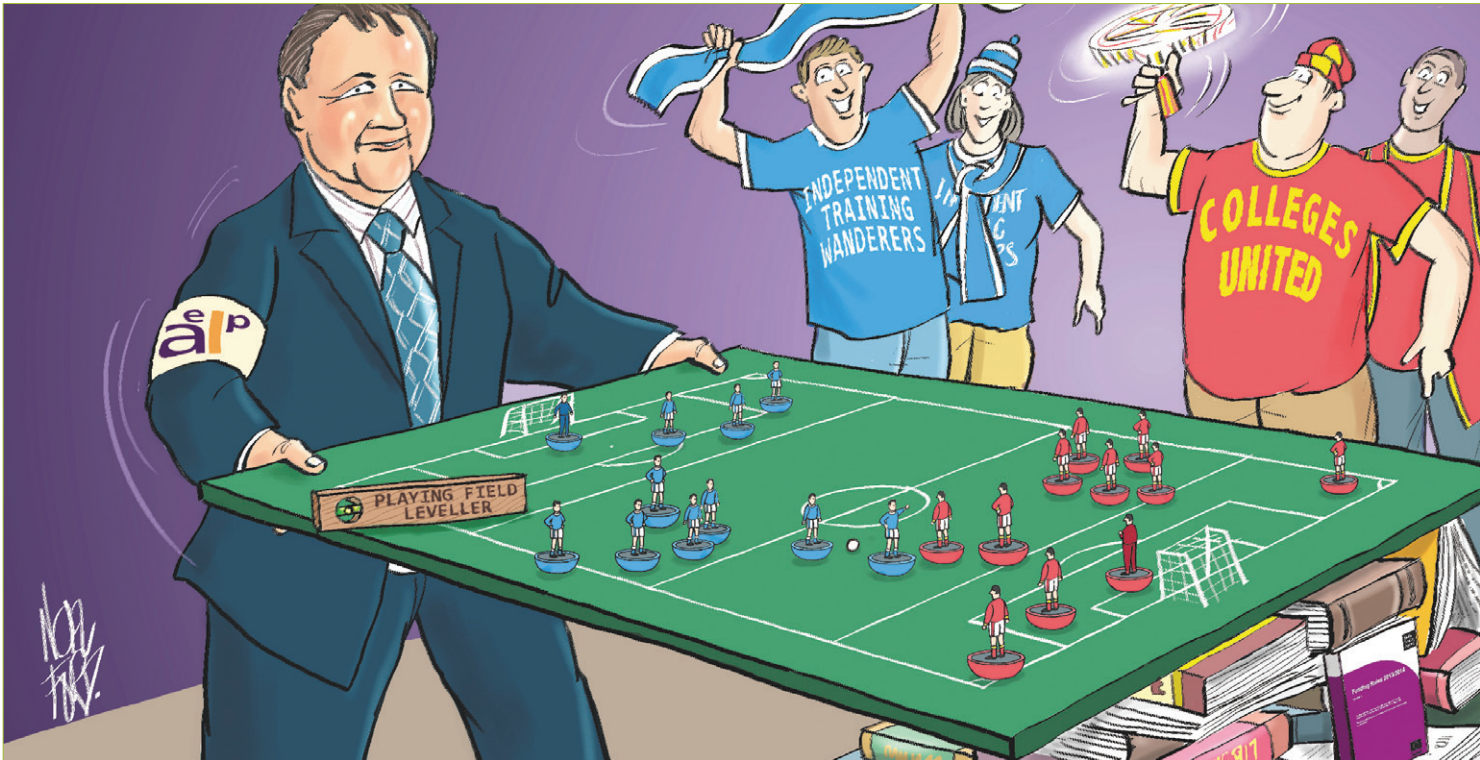
We can say categorically that the top of page 2 in last week's paper was mistaken in listing edition number 55. It should, without a doubt, have said edition 57.

Well spotted Phil Hyde from Cleethorpes-based North East Lincolnshire Council Community Learning Services.

And one other thing — our apologies to South Gloucestershire and Stroud College's Shelley Kenny for referring to her as a 'Mr' in our campus round-up pages.

Have you spotted something wrong with this edition of *FE Week*?

If so, feel free to tell us about it, including the page number and story headline, and explain what the problem is. Email us at news@feweek.co.uk with Corrections in the subject line.



Hoyle's level playing field legacy

Chris Henwood
@Chris_Henwood

Warm tributes have been paid to Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) chief executive Graham Hoyle after the announcement of his retirement.

The 66-year-old is expected to step down this summer after 11 years at the helm having achieved "more of a level playing field between colleges and independent training providers".

Martin Dunford, AELP chairman, said there had been "growth and success" with Mr Hoyle at the top, adding: "He will be a hard act to follow."

Paul Eeles, Emfec (formerly East Midlands Further Education Council) and ABC Awards Group chief executive, worked under Mr Hoyle for five years from 2005 as AELP director of sector reforms. He said Mr Hoyle had his "utmost admiration for all that he has achieved as the AELP chief executive."

"One of his achievements will have been

advocating and achieving more of a level playing field between colleges and independent training providers," said Mr Eeles.

He added: "Graham's strategic thinking, influencing of ministers and officials, warmth and humour will be greatly missed. I have very much valued his guidance and support over the past 11 years. I wish him all the very best."

Mr Hoyle's retirement follows a career that includes 20 years with the Employment Service before a move in the mid-1980s to the Training Agency, first as area manager for Devon and Cornwall, then for Gloucestershire and Wiltshire.

In the 1990s, he became chief executive of the Gloucestershire Training and Enterprise Council (TEC). He was then behind the creation of the Gloucestershire Development Agency and the 5 County West of England Development Agency.

Mr Hoyle, a grandfather, was also chair of the TEC National Council's Education and Training Committee, before the AELP came knocking in 2002.

His contribution to the skills sector was recognised in 2008 with an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours for services to training.

Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel said it had been a "privilege" working with Mr Hoyle.

"Graham has taught me much and where we have disagreed, it has been in a spirit of open discourse. But in the majority of circumstances, his wise leadership has enabled our two organisations to forge alliances in key policy areas that I think have served our respective members and students well," he said.

Susan Pember, director of FE and skills investment at the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills, said: "Graham really understands the importance of having a strong national apprenticeship programme and has been an incredible ambassador for apprentices and apprenticeship providers. He has been very effective in ensuring the role of the independent provider is fully appreciated and recognised as fundamental to the success of the skills system."

Comment

Guide to FE learning tech

I think it's all about providing learners with engaging and fun online learning that is accessible as possible. Mobile learning is becoming really popular, but learning needs to be delivered in small chunks that can revisited as and when it's convenient to the learner. Mobile learning can be the delivery model that really engages the non-engaged.

If a blended delivery model is established from day one it is much easier to keep learners engaged, rather than start expecting learners to access resources out of the classroom once a course has started. The flipped classroom can help because the learner will not be able to join the face-to-face session if they haven't done the virtual part first.

Carolyn Lewis

Love the idea of flip learning, but what do you

do about those students who refuse to work outside class times?

Janette Parry

New regional roles at Ofsted

With all the negative press about the performance of London colleges and the corresponding positive press about London school improvement it is a shame the London director has not got a Learning and Skills background.

Although it has become all too easy to pick on colleges it is conveniently forgotten that they are often trying to correct the shortfall in the education that their students received in schools, particularly in maths and English. A thriving FE sector is crucial to economic recovery. Hopefully in two years' time there will be more positive pronouncements about the perceived health of colleges.

Phil Hatton

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FE Week profile

Angela O'Donoghue ~ her story

Eleanor Radford
@EleanorRadford

The principal of South Essex College talks to FE Week

Angela O'Donoghue doesn't see herself as ambitious. In fact, the principal of South Essex College, who has set up a Sixth Form College from scratch and been awarded a CBE, considers herself having always been "lucky".

She has a reputation for reaching out to people, from teaching excluded schoolgirls to blind and disabled students, as well as helping forge a way for women getting into construction and engineering.

But the 56-year-old simply views work as a pleasure and has "loved every minute of it".

Growing up in a close-knit Catholic family with five brothers and sisters in Rock Ferry, near Liverpool, O'Donoghue was taught by nuns at Birkenhead grammar and visited church every Sunday.

"We didn't have a lot of money, but it was an idyllic childhood," she says.

"My father was strict but there was a lot of love and that has an impact on you the rest of your life. It taught me compassion and that one of the reasons you are here is to be supportive to the people around you."

Her father was a transport manager before working at an FE college himself, but it was O'Donoghue's mother who really left her mark.

While her father didn't really want his wife to work, she set-up a luncheon club. By the time she finished she had premises and was voluntarily producing 150 meals a day.

"She ran it until she was 76," O'Donoghue says proudly.

"If she'd been in a different era she would have been a very successful career woman but she wasn't, so she was a community leader.

"It's what women do differently that brings an added dimension — that's what my mother taught me.

"The attributes women bring, in emotional intelligence and how to get people behind you, are the things they should build on. Women do it really well — they just need the confidence to know they can."

After training as a biology teacher at what is now Liverpool Hope University, O'Donoghue became pregnant with her daughter, Clare, when she was 22.

But unable to stay away from the classroom, she picked up work again just two years later, teaching biology as well as maths to pupils described to her at the time as those "no one else wanted to teach".

"Our principal was forward-thinking and had bid to get a new wing for learners with physical disabilities and visual or hearing impairment," says O'Donoghue of her time at Liverpool's Mill Brook College which eventually became Liverpool Community College.

That's normal now, she says, but this was 1981 and it was the first college in the country to bring the group into mainstream provision.

"I had one biology class with someone who was totally blind and two with visual impairments and I remember thinking 'how the hell am I going to teach a visual subject to someone with no vision?' It got me to think in a completely different way and was a real challenge," adds O'Donoghue.

The feedback from other learners was that teaching was better because she had to "teach very carefully and clearly".

At the age of just 26, and having survived a number of mergers, O'Donoghue ended up heading provision for learning and learning disabilities across the college.

She said the impact she had on young people's lives drove her because she was working with those "no one else was interested in", such as girls with serious behavioural problems.

"Many had been in care or had been put in a special school just because they told a teacher to 'eff off'," she says.

"They often didn't respect teachers and I thought, well, why would they? Some were homeless and I would try to help them — I was interested in them as individuals. People respond if you take an interest in them, don't they?"

"My career in a way was my escapism from being a carer"

Among the restructures, she was next asked to take over science, technology and health with engineering and construction.

"I knew nothing about it," recalls O'Donoghue.

"They wanted me to go in there and completely change the male-dominated environment.

"People didn't like it at first, they'd say 'what do you know?' There weren't even female toilets, but by the time I left in the late Eighties I had a great deal of respect from those people, which was really good for me."

How did she really win them around?

"People say they like me because I say things just like they are, perhaps that's the Scouser in me," she says.

"I'm straight with people — but what I love is people, all different types."

O'Donoghue helped recruit women to train in electrical installation and says they would challenge men about their attitudes, gradually changing the dynamic.

Following yet another restructure she decided she wasn't "going through this again" so started to look outside Liverpool and got a job at Wigan and Leigh College, ending up as acting principal.

Yet as her career continued to soar it was



during these years O'Donoghue faced the darkest years of her life.

At the age of 39, and after being a carer for nine years, she lost her husband Mick to pancreatitis.

The pair met as youngsters in Rock Ferry, down the road from where her father had worked, but when Mick was just 35 he developed the condition from a cyst on his pancreas.

"My career in a way was my escapism from being a carer," she says.

"He had been so seriously ill, going out to work during the day kept my sanity.

"There were times when it was really difficult. Sometimes I would come home and then go straight to hospital, but you just manage your life, don't you?"

"In the evenings he would be in bed and I could do some extra work — we had a routine and it worked."

It was 12 months after her husband died that O'Donoghue decided to move.

"It was time to let go — I needed to make a big change in my life so I moved to Hackney," she says.

It was here O'Donoghue helped create the Brooke House sixth form college, under former Home Secretary David Blunkett's vision for such an institution in every town.

"I loved the buzz of Hackney — all the young people were so appreciative and I learned every aspect of how a college runs."

Never one to sit still O'Donoghue, after five years, went on to Sunderland College where she said her team turned around results so fast, they "wiped out the competition".

But having worked her magic back up north, just six months ago O'Donoghue decided to settle in Essex where her daughter and

granddaughter live.

She says she still doesn't know who put her forward for her CBE — for services to FE — announced this year.

"That's what touched me the most — that someone would take the time to nominate me. It was such a privilege that someone recognised the work I've done," says O'Donoghue.

"When I think about those girls I worked with back in Liverpool all those years ago, they are productive members of society with their own families and jobs, making major contributions and it was FE that did it for them. Otherwise they would have been in and out of prison.

"I think the contribution FE colleges make is huge and I've loved every minute.

"We're the sector that give people second, third and fourth chances."

It's a personal thing

What's your favourite book?

Tess of the d'Urbervilles by Thomas Hardy

What did you want to be when you were younger?

A dietitian

What do you do to switch off from work?

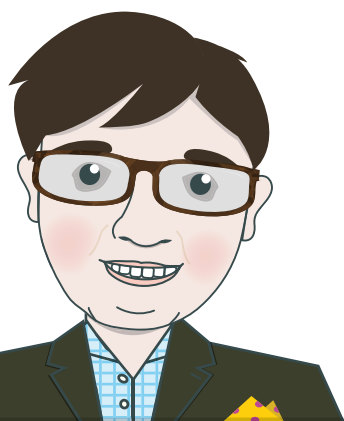
I keep tropical fish

If you could invite anyone to a dinner party, living or dead, who would it be?

Van Morrison, Nelson Mandela, [African American civil rights campaigner] Rosa Parks, Marie Curie, Oscar Wilde

What would your super power be?

To read minds



FE INSIDER | Ben Nicholls
@bnichollsuk

Former House of Commons Education Select Committee adviser Ben Nicholls is head of policy at London's Newham College. He writes exclusively for *FE Week*, every month.

Last year, I was lucky enough to visit Singapore for a few days with MPs. Once we'd got used to the temperature, and established that smoking and gum-chewing weren't great ideas, we had an enjoyable and hectic week visiting schools, colleges and government agencies.

A highlight of the visit was the Institute of Technical Education, which provides high-quality technical and vocational education in a range of areas, from catering to computing.

Everywhere you looked, brilliant lectur-

ers were offering innovative and engaging teaching to motivated students, in top-class facilities.

On the flight home, in between episodes of vintage sit-coms, I wondered why I'd never seen provision like that in England. Now that I've been working in the FE sector for two months, I realise that such provision — from the brilliant lecturers to the motivated students — is all around. The difference is that in Singapore everyone talks about it.

Readers of *FE Week* don't need a new arrival to the sector to tell them how amazing provision can be, but perhaps it bears repeating.

Much has been made of Sir Michael Wilshaw's first report as Ofsted chief inspector, where he argued that the learning and skills sector was not improving, but the same Sir Michael agreed before the Commons Education Committee recently, that this was a "phenomenally important" sector — and the report itself acknowledged "many good, outstanding and sometimes genuinely world class providers".

He suggested that some colleges and principals felt "neglected", and called for the Government to "shine a spotlight".

I couldn't agree more. There's clearly lots of amazing provision, and the sector does get less attention — from government, the

media, etc — than schools and universities. And yet, as any lighting technician would know, it's hard to shine a spotlight on a stage where the actors, however talented, are reluctant to come out from behind the curtains.

A quick look through old reports confirms what I suspected — during my two-and-a-bit years with the education committee, only a handful of written submissions came from FE colleges, despite a number of inquiries. Busy principals and other staff lack the time to contribute to every consultation in what can sometimes feel like a never-ending succession from the Westminster-Whitehall village, but surely we should do everything in our own power to move away from the 'Cinderella' image talked about by Sir Michael?

The same is true of the defensive reaction by some to the Ofsted report itself. While understandable, it is by being proactive and positive about what FE offers to so many people, and to society more widely, that greater political clout will come, rather than supporting the status quo and batting back any criticism (however unreasonable).

I feel proud and privileged to have joined the FE sector at what could be a hugely exciting time, and I am in awe of the amazing work the colleges I've already come across

are doing, and want to do.

It's sad, though, that it took a trip to the Far East for me to realise — despite working in education policy — just how special the sector is.

Part of this problem lies outside our own doors, and the fact that FE sits between two government departments, for example. The range of policies over a number of years hasn't helped the sector; neither has the fact that so few policy-makers have FE backgrounds.

But there is a bit we can start to cure: in selling ourselves outside the boroughs we sit in, contributing to debates, responding to consultations, and encouraging students and colleagues to do the same.

It may seem like simply another thing to add to already-overflowing piles of work, but it might be a small price to pay if it means fewer poor decisions are made for (and to) the sector as a whole. FE is too good a secret to keep to ourselves.

Ben Nicholls

FE Week Experts

Better learning opportunities for prisoners



Weston College is educating inmates at 13 prisons across South West England having won the region's Offender Learning and Skills Service (Olass) contract. Principal Dr Paul Phillips talks about the challenges he and his staff, not to mention offenders, face.

When we decided to bid for delivery of the Olass for the South West of England, I don't think any of us realised the challenge we were letting ourselves in for; although simultaneously there was excitement about getting involved in a journey that had a long way to go.

The team we assembled to write the bid comprised a mix of expertise gained from commercial ventures, offender learning and FE.

We were clear from day one that we could do better than some of the existing providers, and we'd experienced the so-called promises of private organisations who failed to deliver on either outcomes or quality.

So we had one key aim — to better the learning opportunities for the prisoners we would meet.

Our presentation was rigorously questioned by members of the Skills Funding Agency, the Prison Service and other offender management representatives.

They wanted proof we could engineer a learning journey, and I felt we could make a massive difference.

So what do you do when you get the contract? Easy — you visit the institutions, gauge what's going on and effect change.

This isn't as simple as it sounds, because to succeed you have to embrace every part of prison culture.

In one institution you may meet the governor; in another, a deputy, and in another no one other than your inherited TUPE'd (Transfer of Undertakings — Protection of Employment) staff.

In some prisons there are key links to industry; in others none. Yet offender learning is about providing the key skills needed for employment and progression.

Then there are the physical resources, the need to ensure that teaching rooms and equipment are fit for purpose — if you need an aver-

age class size of 12 to break even what do you do if your rooms only seat four? You also need time to be entrepreneurial and to effect a change of mindset — the world of social enterprise beckons and I consider it key to change mindsets and bring about results.

“Offender learning is about providing the key skills needed for employment”

Some might argue cynicism, but I am just being realistic and looking for alternative ways of reaching the goal.

The solution is usually in front of you and some successful social enterprises have originated from previous offenders who, on leaving prison, have become entrepreneurs willing to help solve problems and create solutions for the future.

We are getting there, but I think we underestimated the time it would take and the magnitude of change.

I suppose I thought we could make an immediate impact in terms of teaching and learning and although we possibly did, we learned most from the prisons themselves and in particular, the prisoners.

They told us they got a 'wage' from working in prison industries, an incentive that many prisons don't have as far as education goes.

They said they needed the support of prison officers to engage in learning and that learning is experiential, not bookish.

Our approach, therefore, has been to create the learning journey. Progress is variable, but where it works there is noticeable success. All prisons are different and change takes time.

The other point missed was the issue of celebrating success. Success culture is there, albeit massively underdeveloped.

Last month, we started to celebrate the work of the prisons in terms of meeting the Olass aims and many education staff stated they had never come across it before.

Celebrating the achievements of prison staff, education staff and the prisoners themselves is crucial.

Perhaps this article comes across as a jumble of success, trials and tribulations, apathy and brilliance; a fair reflection of what has happened to both myself and my team. We have had to create a robust starting point.

It is not about taking the old methodologies of prison learning and adapting them to Olass — it is about a new agenda of partnership learning and investing for the future from many perspectives. We thought we could make a difference — and we are.

Weston College principal Dr Paul Phillips

FE Week Experts

Alumni can offer more than money

Universities don't bid a final farewell to their students — the world of higher education alumni bodies is a well-populated one that brings its own rewards. It's about time FE colleges jumped on board, says Iain Mackinnon.

Why would a college bother to make links with its alumni? Professional fundraisers in universities sometimes contrast their sharp focus with what they see as the rather woolly alternative of 'friend-raising', as though the only reason to connect with former students is to take money off them.

I suspect that mentality has held us back a bit in colleges, but I now see encouraging signs of action from colleges which have realised that alumni offer them far more than a rather hazy glimpse of modest donations.

Take Sheffield College, for example. It features a number of former students in an excellent promotional video using their enthusiasm for their old college to attract new students.

Or Leeds College of Music — now part of the Leeds College Group — which has dozens of pen portraits on its website of former students now well-launched on their careers, to inspire and inform current students.

Or Moulton College — Northamptonshire's land-based college — which connects recent alumni and current students through a struc-

tured mentoring programme.

What connects them is a focus on recent alumni, and on immediate benefits to current students.

In my own college, I have drawn attention to Dora Rudolf who joined us to learn English, went on to do a cabin crew course, and has now landed a job with Emirates.

I want her to come back to inspire and excite the next group of cabin crew students (and to pass on tips about the latest practice to her tutors), and I'd love her to go into an Esol class, too, to show students that it is realistic to aim for a good job after the course.

And, if we keep up the relationship, I hope Dora will open the door for work experience places with Emirates, and for her, or a colleague, to advise us on our curriculum.

But when I surveyed the scene two years ago, I found very little alumni activity in colleges.

Beyond a few examples in Scotland (which is always worth a look for English colleges seeking inspiration), and some sixth form colleges building on old boys' and old girls' associations, the greatest activity was in residential colleges, both those serving students with special needs, and land-based colleges.

We now have two organisations offering professionally packaged alumni solutions to colleges, other colleges getting going with their own home-grown initiatives, and a workshop on

alumni relations at next month's Association of Colleges (AoC) conference for communications professionals.

To say the issue is 'taking FE by storm' would be going too far, but at long last it does look like colleges are finding ways to convert what has long been strong latent interest into action.

Think Alumni exhibited at last year's AoC annual conference and has signed up a dozen or so colleges, from New College Nottingham to East Kent, by offering them a ready-made package. Visit www.thinkalumni.com for more details.

And Future First is a charity originally set up to reconnect recent former students with their old schools, so they get the same kind of face-to-face advice on careers that pupils at private schools get. The need is identical in colleges, so I'm pleased that it has now extended its work to include us. Visit www.futurefirst.org.uk for more details.

Further useful resources can be found through the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (www.case.org), Giving To Colleges (www.givingtocolleges.org) and the FE Fundraising and Alumni (www.jiscmail.ac.uk/FEFUNDRAISINGANDALUMNI) discussion group.

To a great extent this is uncharted territory for Britain's colleges. I have been trying to understand what we can learn from universi-



ties and from US community colleges, who are slightly ahead of us.

We have a lot to learn, but we are in the learning business and there is a growing college community of interest to learn from. The prize for our students is great if we get this right.

So why would a college bother to make links with its alumni? To help its current students, of course.

Iain Mackinnon is a governor of Ealing, Hammersmith and West London College. He will be chairing a session on 'Developing successful alumni relations' at the AoC Communications Conference on Wednesday, March 20.

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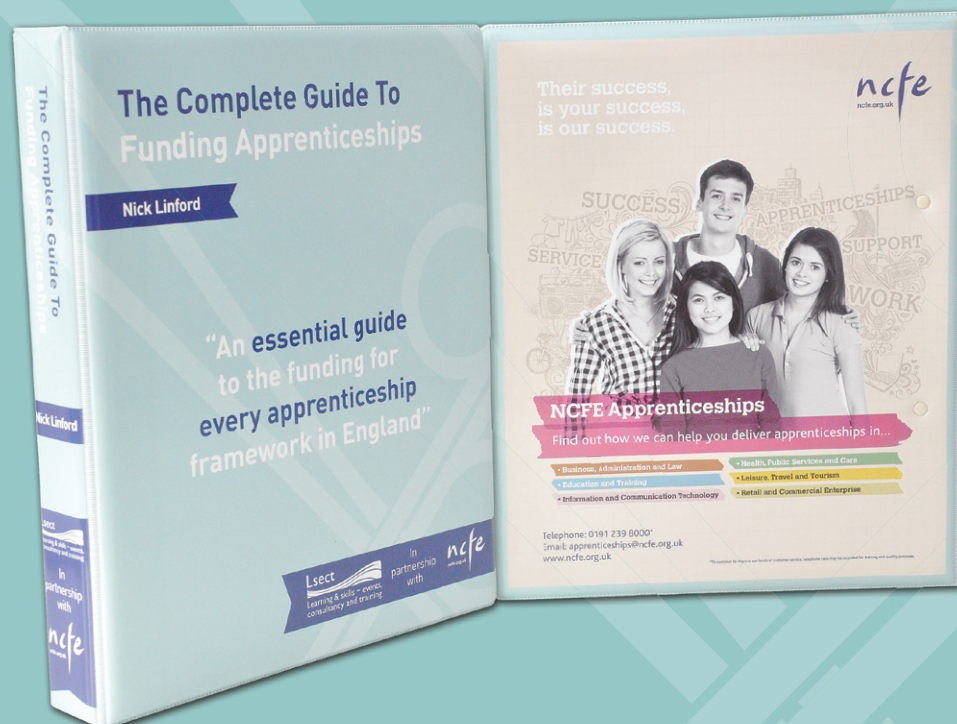
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FE Week Experts

White paper raises the flag for sixth

Colleges often feel undervalued and under threat. The Sixth Form Colleges Association, launched last week, is determined to change that

Chris Henwood

@Chris_Henwood

More than 150 guests were at Westminster for the official unveiling of the rebranded Sixth Form Colleges Association and heard how sector principals were competing in an unfair education market.

The event, on Tuesday, came just hours after the association, which previously called itself a forum, produced a White Paper for ministers, arguing “students should receive the same amount of funding for their education, irrespective of the type of institution they choose to study at”.

An association spokesperson said: “Data from the Department for Education shows the median funding per learner in academies with key stage 4 is £7,880, while the median funding per learner in sixth form colleges is £4,601.

“Furthermore, sixth form colleges have to pay VAT on goods and services, while schools and academies are reimbursed for these costs — an anachronism which costs sixth form colleges an estimated £30m per year.

“I don’t think sixth form colleges are properly appreciated by ministers”

“Forthcoming changes to the way that 16-18 education and training is funded will further disadvantage sixth form colleges.”

Association chair David Igoe told Westminster guests: “We [sixth form colleges] are noted for the excellent quality and 76 per cent of our colleges are judged by Ofsted to be outstanding or good.

“We educate more than 150,000 young people aged 16 to 18, we supply one-in-seven of all entrants to British universities and we are true engines of social mobility with more students of disadvantaged backgrounds and low retainment that can be found in either schools or academy sixth forms — so we do a great job.

“But, despite this, we do feel undervalued and under threat. We accept there is a market for sixth form education, but it’s not a level playing field. We are in the market at a disadvantage.

“We play uphill against the opposition. We are very concerned about our future and the White Paper highlights this.

“We want the government to build on the success of the sixth form colleges model, which provides a template for efficient and effective delivery for 16 to 18 education.

“We want to create a genuine mechanism for

sixth form colleges to grow and promote the sector in the same way that academies and free schools are actively promoted by the government. We hope this will be a real springboard for a better deal for our colleges.

“We are now a strong association with a clear agenda, and we look to politicians from all parties and constituencies to support us to give us that level playing field where our quality and our success will be the only thing that counts.”

The event, with guests including Lady Sharp and MPs Sir Bob Russell and Nic Dakin, also marked the official launch of the all party parliamentary group for sixth form colleges.

Group chair Kelvin Hopkins MP, who has been a governor of Luton Sixth Form College for 20 years, said: “This is a very special reception because it comes so shortly after the formation of the all party group — and it genuinely is an ‘all party’ group.

“I happen to be a Labour member of Parliament myself, but we have vice chairs from four other parties and a secretary from the Conservative Party. All parties support it because we all know what a superb job sixth form colleges do.

“We felt it necessary to raise the flag for sixth form colleges, to lobby ministers and to ensure they are aware of the great value and tremendous success of sixth form colleges.”

He added: “My view is that the government would do well to form many more sixth form colleges if it wants to make sure youngsters get the best possible education between the ages of 16 and 19, and that they have the most efficient form of education in that age group, too.

“My second House of Commons speech, many years ago, was in praise of sixth form colleges. I asked ministers to do more to support them and to sustain them and to treat them fairly in relation to other educational institutions.

“I said in my speech they were geese that lay golden eggs. Another metaphor was that they were jewels in our educational crown, and I genuinely believe that — they are the best educational institutions we have.

“Every other institution has some kind of drawback, but sixth form colleges actually work and do a superb job. I don’t think sixth form colleges are properly appreciated by ministers. They need to be told and it’s our job to tell them just that.”

FE Minister Matthew Hancock was at the launch and paid tribute to the performance of sixth form colleges.

“Sixth form colleges have for decades now been doing the job and playing the role that is central to the government’s vision for the future of education, which is autonomous and strong organisations with local leadership embedded in the community,” he said.

“There is one sector that has excellent results ... through strong local leadership of organisations that are responsive and autonomous that has delivered high standards, and that’s



Sixth Form Colleges Association chief executive David Igoe



Student award winner Edvarda Salinaite, 20, with Shadow Education Minister Stephen Twigg

th form colleges



Student award winner Arthi Nachiappan, 18, addresses audience members at the launch event

the sixth form college sector and I support you hugely in what you do.”

Shadow Education Secretary Stephen Twigg, who gave out awards to sixth form college students for efforts to promote international understanding, also spoke at the event.

“I’ve had the opportunity over the last year or so to visit several sixth form colleges around the country and to see the brilliant work that is going on. We’ve had a number of meetings and I look forward to meeting the all party group now that it’s been set up,” he said.

“The principle of the level playing field is a sound one and I look forward to engaging with the association and with the all party group over these next few months in terms of the detail in the White Paper, which I very much welcome.”

Arthi Nachiappan, 18 and from Nottingham’s Bilborough College, claimed the association’s gold medal. She speaks English and Tamil and

is studying Spanish and French. She also goes to Polish language sessions every week and is a member of the Sierra Leone Project.

She said: “It really is an honour to be here at the launch of the SFCA. It’s important for me to highlight that there are many other students in my college who could equally have been nominated for his award.

“I hope politicians across the political spectrum will continue to support this dynamic and effective form of post-16 education so that students in the future can have similar opportunities to improve their own international understanding.”

The silver award went to Edvarda Salinaite, 20 and from Grimsby’s Franklin College, while bronze was picked up by Kyle Turakhia, 17 and from Leicester’s Wyggeston and Queen Elizabeth I College and Sheikh Shahnawaz, 18 and from Birmingham’s Joseph Chamberlain College.



FE Minister Matthew Hancock

UPCOMING EVENTS

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12-03-13 : London half day critical update
Implementation and funding FE loans

18-03-13 : London half day critical update
EFA (16-19) funding reform and 2013/14

27-03-13 : Birmingham half day critical update
EFA (16-19) funding reform and 2013/14

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Issue 1 of the NCFE sponsored FE funding factsheet enclosed

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FE funding factsheet 16-19 funding reform

This factsheet, produced by Nick Linford, summarises the key features of the new 16-19 funding system

A new per student funding system

The purpose of this document is to describe the 16-19 National Funding Formula that will be used to calculate revenue allocations for education and training provision, funded by the Education Funding Agency (EFA), for the academic year 2013/14 (1st August 2013 - 31 July 2014) and beyond.

For 2013/14, we will replace the current formula with funding per student. To take account of real variations in costs we will apply a weighting for the higher costs of some subject areas, another for retention of students, plus a single allocation for each institution for disadvantaged students. We will also uplift the whole individual plus an area costs adjustment where applicable. We will then add funding for each institution for those individual students with learning difficulties or disabilities with the highest needs, funding for bursaries, care standards funding and other financial support for students.

We will protect against redistribution of funds by making sufficient funding available to ensure that no institution loses any funding per student for at least three academic years (until and including 2015/16) due directly to the funding formula changes.

Number of hours used to calculate funding

Student status	Hours required per year	Funded at
Full time	540 +	600
Band 4	450-539	405
Band 3	360-449	320
Band 2	280-359	% of 600
Band 1	up to 280	

The new 16-19 funding formula

As an interim measure students that were categorised as full time (650 guided learning hours [gth]) will be funded at the full time rate in allocations for both 2013/14 and 2014/15. Following this students that are recorded in the 450-540 band in 2013/14 will, from 2015/16 only attract part time funding.

FE Week campus round-up

sponsored by **empra**

Heads in the cloud for game design students



Games development students Liz Wright and Ben Price, both 18, work side by side and with students at a campus four miles away

Two groups of Midland computer whizzes managed to create a 2D game without even sharing a classroom.

Level three diploma games development students at Birmingham Metropolitan College worked on the project from campuses four miles apart using 'cloud' technology.

Student Liz Wright, 18, said: "A resource like this means that if for any reason I couldn't make it into college then I could still collaborate online with my classmates and teachers, and carry on with my work."

The software the learners used, IBM Smarter Planet, included tools such as file sharing, web conferencing and instant messaging, and was developed by the college to allow it to deliver learning to students outside traditional classroom environments.

College principal Dame Christine Braddock said: "Using the latest developments in cloud computing, we can improve the quality of our teaching and support for BMET students, equipping them with the skills employers value now and in the future."

College helps learner launch clothing line



From left: Adam Garwood, Tyler Vaughan and Tom Lawson, all 18

A Brighton business student is making his voice heard by launching his own t-shirt brand with help from a local businessman.

Tom Lawson, 18, teamed up with City College photography student Tyler Vaughan and part-time games designing student Adam Garwood, both also 18, to form Sick of Silence Clothing after getting some advice from the college's resident entrepreneur, Nigel Lambe.

Tom said: "We all have real passion for fashion, design and business but were slightly unsure how to start up and what approach to take with the company."

He added that the support available at the

college had helped them to take the project further.

"Nigel Lambe was a great source of knowledge on the legal side. We made our first sales at the college's Christmas fair; the college then paid for us to attend an enterprise conference in London where we were able to meet some really inspirational people which drove us to do even more with the business," said Tom.

Their clothing range is now available online, at www.sickofsilenceclothing.co.uk and will soon be available in local independent shops.



Engineering scholarship winner James Martin, 21

Apprentice lays career foundations

A Lancashire construction apprentice is building on his career with a scholarship awarded because of his academic ability and potential to excel.

James Martin, 21, is studying for a diploma in construction and the built environment and an NVQ in built environmental design at Bolton College and has been awarded the scholarship by the North West Institution of Civil Engineers.

James, who also works for Lancashire County Council as a technician in the highways department, said: "I am over the moon to receive the scholarship. It came as a total surprise for me, as competition was tough. Receiving the award has boosted my confidence in the workplace and will only serve my future career prospects."

The QUEST (Queen's Jubilee Scholarship Trust) technician scholarship gives financial assistance to students getting hands-on experience while studying towards a professional engineering qualification.

Roger Kendall, professional building lecturer at Bolton College, said: "James is very deserving of the scholarship and I'm thrilled his hard work and dedication to the industry has been recognised. He is an outstanding student, who will be an asset to any project he works on."



Student Jack Cleaver, 24, behind the wheel of the newly restored car

Students breathe new life into old police car

A duo of Devon apprentices have earned their stripes by restoring a decommissioned police car to its former glory.

South Devon College automotive apprentices Jack Cleaver, 24, and Jordan Brewster, 20, from Teignmouth, took 18 months to strip down, re-spray, apply period stripes and replace engine parts of the 13-year-old 1.6 diesel Ford Escort.

The car had been deteriorating since being taken out of service in 2006.

Jack, from Torquay, said: "I really enjoyed working on this project. The vinyls were the trickiest part of the car to put on as it all had

to be done by sight. The most fun part was stripping it down."

The car, which patrolled Plymouth and Ivybridge during its service for Devon and Cornwall Police, will form a memorial piece at the Heritage and Learning Resource, in Okehampton.

Brixham PCSO Paul Martin, who oversaw the restoration on behalf of the police, thanked the college and the sponsors, local companies Mill Autoquip, Gliddon Ford and Avon Auto Colours.

He said: "This completed project is a real credit to the college, apprentices and staff involved."

Want your college or training provider to appear on these pages?

Send your stories with pictures to news@feweek.co.uk including names, ages and course of students where applicable

Design students help raise LGBT awareness



Poster for the LGBT tolerance campaign, created by Diana Andraloit, 26, featuring Diana herself and Karina Andraloit, 17

Creative learners in London aimed to turn heads, change minds and promote diversity for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) History Month.

BTec art and design, and graphic design students at the College of North West London were challenged by tutor Philip Crichton to create eye-catching posters to raise awareness of the event last month.

It celebrates the lives and achievements of members of the LGBT community, and the

college marked the month as part of its regular work with LGBT rights charity Stonewall.

Chris Dye, Stonewall's education officer, said: "It's great to see students actively involved in the college's work to tackle homophobia and celebrate difference. When the work is led by students themselves this has the most impact."

The posters are displayed around the college's two campuses in Wembley and Willesden.



From left: Gillian Quick, Worlebury St Paul's Primary head teacher; Simon Taylor; Weston College ceramics lecturer; and Weston HE student Hazel Jackson with pupils Bethany, Stan, Alfie and Scarlett with some previous school artwork

Ceramic artist all fired up to help kids

A young North Somerset ceramic artist will be helping schoolchildren's ideas take root.

Hazel Jackson, 25, a Weston College third year degree student, will work with lecturer Simon Taylor to create a ceramic 'tree of life' for the spiritual garden.

It will take pride of place at Worlebury St Paul's CofE Primary School.

The 'tree', measuring 6ft x 5ft, will consist of seven ceramic friezes each based on Bible-inspired pictures drawn by pupils at the school.

Hazel said: "I'm really looking forward to working with the children and creating a wonderful work of art."

The children's designs will be voted on by parents, governors and church members.

Simon said: "The tree of life project is so exciting. It provides an opportunity for pupils to showcase their creative talents that will be combined with Hazel's designs and made into a ceramic sculpture to enhance the school's spiritual garden."

Head teacher Gillian Quick said the project would commemorate the school's expansion this year.

She added: "The theme of the Creation was chosen because of our Church school ethos, and will involve all of our children and school community."



From left: Doncaster college staff Jordan Pickering, Keith Sanders, Matt Harriman, Michael Rook, Paul Kellaway and Luke Gray

Doncaster College takes on veterans for charity

Staff and students from Doncaster have kicked off a training regime to tackle a charity five-a-side football match against former pro stars.

The Doncaster College learners and lecturers are taking part in the Team of Steel tournament organised by Weston Park Hospital Cancer Charity as part of their Do Your Bit Campaign.

The competition will see them compete against former Sheffield United FC players at the club's ground.

Tina Harrison, acting deputy director of the charity, said: "Weston Park Hospital is Doncaster's local specialist cancer hospital so it is fantastic the college is supporting the work of the charity in this way."

Team organiser and Doncaster College course leader Paul Kellaway said his previous work for Sheffield Teaching Hospitals had made him aware of the ground-breaking research done at Weston Park Hospital.

He added: "Having this prior knowledge further motivated me to become the driving force behind putting a team together for the tournament.

"My mum, Dorothy, who is now in remission, has had both surgery and chemotherapy for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma at Weston Park Hospital.

"It is time we defeated this devastating disease and its sometimes tragic consequences for patients, families and friends."

Ofsted boss praises Hull College



From left: Matthew Coffey, Ofsted, director of learning and skills, Sir Michael Wilshaw, chief inspector at Ofsted Mark Pearson, director of funding and information services, Derek Wills, vice principal for HE, and Lynne Richardson, principal of Goole College, part of Hull College Group

Ofsted boss Sir Michael Wilshaw dropped in on a Yorkshire college and praised it as an "example to others".

The four-hour visit, on Friday, February 22, to Hull College involved meeting staff and students and came four years after it got outstanding across the board following inspection.

Sir Michael said: "The college has certainly impressed me. It is my third visit to a college and it was a heart-warming experience.

"I have spoken to the students and the staff and all of them have said how much they

enjoy working here, being here and learning here.

"This is a shining beacon of good practice and one of the issues we have just discussed is how we can disseminate that good practice to other institutions."

Hull College chief executive Gary Warke said: "We're very proud of our students and staff and all that they achieve, and the fact Sir Michael has gone away with such a positive impression of the organisation will only serve as motivation to continue striving even harder."

FE Week campus round-up

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Cadiz trip brings Spanish lessons to life



AS-level and GCSE students enjoying the Spanish sun

Students in Hampshire said ‘hola’ to GCSE learners from a nearby school with a joint trip to Spain.

Alton College youngsters were joined by pupils from Amery Hill School as they visited Cadiz to experience local culture and develop their language skills.

AS-level student Fin Loh, 16, said: “This experience brought our Spanish lessons to life. It will be hard to forget such an enjoyable insight into Spanish culture.”

The students stayed with families in Jerez de la Frontera, Cadiz, studied at a language school and enjoyed the local sights including a much-loved local carnival.

Olga Culebras, head of Spanish at both Alton College and Amery Hill School, said: “Once again our students were great ambassadors for both the school and college.

“People in the south of Spain have a great sense of humour and our students thoroughly enjoyed the experience.”

Macclesfield chefs take home 28 medals

Young chefs in Cheshire demonstrated their skills were on fire when they competed at the Welsh Culinary Championships.

Of the 30 catering students from Macclesfield College competing at the event in Llandrillo, North Wales, 28 came away with medals or certificates, including five silver awards, nine bronzes and 12 certificates of merit.

“We’re immensely proud of the achievements of our students, all of whom performed brilliantly at the event and were a credit to the college,” said curriculum leader Mark Boswell.

The Macclesfield team’s speciality at the competition was flambé, with Anton Partington, 16, winning best in class for his flambé main course and Whitney Jennings, 17, winning the same for her flambé dessert.

Whitney, along with fellow student Josh Singleton, 21, also received a silver award in the open category, which invites entries from experienced professionals as well as learners.

Mr Boswell said: “It is incredible that both Whitney and Josh received such high awards in the open class, which includes other people who have been in the industry for much, much longer.

“To get silver awards in that category deserves a great amount of credit.”



Josh Singleton preparing his silver award-winning dish



Jewellery student Chris Townsend, 37, who took part in a documentary in London’s Hatton Garden

Jewellers learn from the experts for film

Trainee jewellers in London polished up their history knowledge on one of the city’s hidden gems for a documentary project.

Jewellery students from Kensington and Chelsea College teamed up with filmmakers Digital: Works to produce a film about Hatton Garden, London’s jewellery quarter and the heart of the UK diamond trade.

As part of the Heritage Lottery Fund-backed project, students were given a tour of the area by historian Rachel Lichtenstein and conducted interviews with craftspeople, residents, and metal and gem suppliers.

Jewellery student Chris Townsend, 37, said the project was an invaluable experience for himself and his classmates.

He added: “It’s not often you meet and interview some of the finest crafts people in the industry. This film has given us that opportunity.

“Hearing their stories and experiences of living and working in Hatton Garden has been fascinating.”

The film, which began shooting in January, will premiere in April.

Chris added: “We’re hoping people enjoy watching it as much as we enjoyed making it.”

Boxing clever interior designers get creative



From left: Students Adedayo Fasaye, 43, Karan Bath, 20, and Janet Lowther, 57, with their jewellery boxes

Trainee interior design students in Kent unearthed a treasure trove of techniques by designing their own jewellery boxes.

The part-time learners studying for a certificate in creative techniques at Mid Kent College created the boxes to help them visualise and experiment with different colour techniques.

Janet Lowther, 57, and from Maidstone, said: “It’s a lot more beneficial to apply paint effects to a jewellery box than it is just looking at them on a piece of paper.

“I enjoyed learning about the effects but I couldn’t see myself using them at first.

Designing these jewellery boxes has helped me discover ways I could use the effects in my house.”

Lecturer Elaine Bentley said she was delighted with the work produced.

She added: “I’m amazed by the quality of the boxes – they’re wonderful.

“This project was all about taking a concept and seeing how far you can go with it.

“I think we all underestimate our ability to come up with new designs, so this was a way of opening my students’ eyes and showing them what they are capable of.”

Want your college or training provider to appear on these pages?

Send your stories with pictures to news@feweek.co.uk including names, ages and course of students where applicable

Paws for thought on animal-assisted therapy

Caring Wiltshire students took time out from their studies to take a collection of pets to a local old people's home.

Fourteen youngsters delighted residents — the oldest 103 — at Kingston House Residential Home, in Calne, with a variety of animals including those from an animal centre and their own pets.

The visit also gave the learners the opportunity to see for themselves the effects of animal-assisted therapy (AAT) as part of their BSc honours degree in animal science and management.

Josh Chitson, 21 and from Priston, near Bath, took a leopard gecko to Kingston House.

He said: "The residents definitely became more animated once the animals came out, some were truly in their element, being able to have contact with them.

"This in turn got them talking about pets they had in the past and experiences they have had with some of the more unusual animals."

Animal therapy is often used in hospices, hospitals and care homes and makes use of the scientifically proven benefits of interaction with animals, such as lowered blood pressure, reduced anxiety and the release of feel-good hormone oxytocin, to promote physical, mental and social wellbeing. One resident, who had just celebrated his 99th birthday, became so relaxed he fell asleep while stroking a guinea pig said the animal's owner, Jes Hooper.

Jes, 23 and from Corsham, said: "I thought they would prefer some of the other animals including the dogs, but those I spoke to asked lots of questions and were very keen to hold the guinea pig.

"I have been aware of AAT since I was young



Wiltshire College animal science students with the animals they took to visit care home residents

as a relative of mine used to work with animals but it was very interesting to see during our visit."

A corn snake by the name of Athena, brought by Louise Hillier, 22, also proved popular.

Louise, from Chippenham, who borrowed Athena from fellow student Kyle Barker, said: "I really expected them to be scared but none of them was at all. They all wanted to hold the snake, see what it felt like and asked lots of questions about what other snakes there were. They really wanted to learn more.

"The benefits of AAT were obvious, particularly one gentleman who really liked oil painting — he asked us to take some photographs so that he could do some painting."

She added: "Another man was bedbound and unable to come downstairs so we went to him and he was really pleased to have visitors. It was a great experience for us."

Dora Coles, 24 and from Marlborough, took her four-month-old Patterdale terrier, Wilbur, and 14-year-old Finn, a fell terrier.

She said: "One of the ladies I spoke to had dementia but once she saw Finn she really opened up and started talking to me.

"It was really lovely for me to see how she responded to Finn and it brought back fond memories of her old dog."

The visit was so successful that other care homes in the area have asked for the students and the animals to visit so their residents can experience the benefits of AAT.

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Happy snappers Paige Haig, 17, and Callum Blithell, 18

Budding photographers gain online exposure

Two young photographers in Cheshire had their work snapped up in a flash by a leading photography website.

Paige Haig, 17, and Callum Blithell, 18, both from Crewe and studying at South Cheshire College, won awards when they submitted their photos to competitive online photo community Pixoto. The pair put their photos on Pixoto as part of a live project brief for their BTec level three photography course.

Paige's image of a pier stretching out into the water in the Lake District was named photo of the day in its category and was rated in the top

15 per cent of all photos on the site.

Paige said: "I feel very pleased to be honoured in the category I entered and it has definitely given me a lot more confidence.

"It has been good experience submitting photographs to competitions and seeing how you fare against some great photographers."

Callum managed to capture a busy motorway and was awarded both photo of the day and photo of the week in his category.

Callum said: "It has been fun to enter this Pixoto competition and great to see my work online."

Hands-on experience for media students



From left: Oliver Smith, 21, ncn student, Jonathan English, co-founder of Skeleton Productions, David Whitaker, 21, ncn student, and Andy Harvard, of Skeleton

More than 100 media students in the East Midlands could be shooting straight to the heart of the film industry with on-the-job training.

Learners at New College Nottingham will have the chance to work on real camera shoots after production company Skeleton Productions pledged to offer a student a placement on every one of their shoots. Broadcast media student David Whitaker, who has already worked with Skeleton Productions, said: "I got so much out of it — getting on-the-ground experience in this industry is so difficult but hugely important

to help me progress onto my first job. This is great opportunity and I can't wait to go and do another shoot soon."

The company averages five shoots a week, and students will be able to take part in all aspects of the creative planning, filming and editing processes.

Skeleton Productions co-founder Jonathan English said: "It's important that we play our role in nurturing the creative talent of the future, inspiring students to stay in Nottingham and support the city's hugely successful creative industries."

www.exe-coll.ac.uk

Exeter College is an outstanding Tertiary College which places teaching, learning and student success as our top priority. The College was subject to the first pilot 'no notice' inspection in 2012 and achieved an overall grade of outstanding. We have high expectations of our students and staff and each year their combined efforts result in excellent exam grades, outstanding training successes and exceptional music, art, sports and community achievements. Following a recent promotion and retirement we are currently seeking two outstanding individuals to join our successful and innovative College Leadership Team as follows:

Head of Faculty – Media and Performing Arts

This successful, growing and creative faculty delivers a full range of academic and vocational courses in Media, Film, Music, Drama, Dance and Performing Arts across a range of programmes and levels. The faculty also plays a significant part in the college's extensive Enrichment programme, such as the choral society, big band and the annual festival of carols held in Exeter Cathedral. Media and Performing Arts is located in the heart of Exeter city with recently developed facilities including a refurbished centre for Music and Performance. The state of the art, industry-standard recording studios, digital TV studio and a fully functioning radio station provide world class opportunities for students and staff to reach their maximum potential.

Head of Faculty – Maths and Science

This is a high performing faculty that has achieved an 'Outstanding' rating for Science in the pilot Ofsted inspection. The offer includes a full range of A Level, GCSE, BTEC Forensic Science and Access Courses, as well as the science and maths components of the International Baccalaureate. There are plans for the design and development of a new building for the Maths and Science curriculum over the next few years and the Head of Faculty will be central to these developments. The faculty has played a key part in the College being awarded the prestigious STEM Assured status by the New Engineering Foundation and, with Exeter University, is supporting the creation of the Exeter Specialist Maths School – one of only two approved in the Country. The development of a Science Park and the designation of Exeter as a City of Science makes this an exciting time for the city, the college and the Faculty of Maths and Science.

Exeter College is committed to safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, young people and adults and expects all staff to share this commitment.

Applicants for both posts will need to demonstrate a passion for delivering outstanding teaching, learning and student success and will have relevant leadership experience. The successful Candidates will set and achieve high standards and have the ability to inspire, lead and motivate successful and talented staff.

The salary range for these posts is between £41,301 - £48,635.

Successful applicants will be required to undertake an enhanced check by the DBS (formally CRB).

For further details and an application form please visit our website www.exe-coll.ac.uk We do not accept CVs or late applications, no agencies please.

**Closing date: Noon,
Monday 18 March 2013.**



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We are looking for a dynamic and professional individual to build on our existing regional and national customer base. As a senior member of the Business Development Team, you will manage our key regional and national customers within **Greater London and the surrounding areas**. This will be to achieve business growth and to ensure excellent customer service to existing and new providers.

You will have previous experience of working with a variety of organisations and managing field-based staff in the education sector. The post requires an understanding and knowledge of the work based learning sector and it would be essential to be a specialist within a specific sector.

The closing date for applications is 4pm on Friday 15 March 2013

NOCN is committed to equality, diversity and inclusion and we particularly want to hear from people from across the community, including people with a disability, people from black and ethnic communities, women and younger people who are able to make a real contribution to the charity and its learners.

More information about NOCN can be found at www.nocn.org.uk
To apply, please go to www.nocn.org.uk/about-us/job-vacancies
Completed applications and equal opportunity forms should be submitted to:
Sarah.Whitham@nocn.org.uk



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To discuss this role in further detail please contact Richard Hill, Managing Director - Commercial, Grimsby Institute Group on 0750 6725571.

Closing Date: 18th March 2013

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Meeting demand for Further Education in the 21st century



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With a turnover of almost £28 million and around 7,500 students, Northampton College is ideally placed for considerable success. Our brand new, state of the art campus provides a modern and innovative learning environment, which together with our town centre buildings and the campus at Daventry, ensures that the College is in a great position to offer education and skills development at all levels.

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As Principal you will develop and implement an ambitious strategy to ensure that we become an outstanding provider of training and education, harnessing internal talent and instilling a culture of achievement. Through effective partnership working and the creation of proactive initiatives you will ensure that the College is at the forefront of the local community and enjoys a reputation of the highest order.

Entrepreneurial and motivational, our successful candidate will have an impressive track record of achievement at a senior level, with experience of leading cultural and structural change. Your background may be either within the FE sector or in a senior leadership role within the wider government funded or commercial sectors, provided you demonstrate the gravitas, vision and expertise to lead us forward.

We are working in partnership with AoC Create on this important appointment. If you are interested in applying you can find all the details you should need at: www.aocrecruit.co.uk/northampton

To arrange an informal discussion with our Chair of Governors, Roger Morris please contact Rosa Oppido on 01604 734316. Or alternatively if you would like to have an informal discussion with our current Principal, Len Closs, please telephone 01604 734200.

Closing date for applications is Sunday 24th March 2013.

Final selection will be held in the College on Wednesday 24th and Thursday 25th April 2013.

visit www.aocrecruit.co.uk/northampton

Shaping professionalism across the learning & skills sector

FE Guild Interim Chief Executive

(initial fixed term contract April - December 2013)

Six figure package (FTE) or commensurate daily rate arrangement

Subject to the support of the Further Education (FE) sector and subsequent ministerial approval, the FE Guild will be a key new organisation to define, develop and enhance the professionalism of the sector workforce and its providers, in order to ensure and improve the quality and impact of learning and teaching and the sector reputation.

As Interim Chief Executive you will be responsible for the setup of the Guild and the transition to initial operational status by August 2013, moving to full operational status thereafter. Working closely with an Interim Governance Board, key stakeholders and most importantly the sector itself; you will be responsible for establishing the structures and operational processes of the organisation, as well as engaging with the sector to develop and implement the initial strategic and business plans.

The successful candidate will be able to demonstrate previous highly effective strategic leadership of a business or organisation, successful change management experience in a challenging environment and a track record of building, shaping and leading highly successful teams, while working in a resource constrained landscape.

Strong advocacy, collaboration, interpersonal, partnership working and stakeholder management skills are all prerequisites for consideration. The individual appointed will have the opportunity to apply for the permanent post when advertised later this year.

If you feel you have the skills and expertise to be considered for this exciting opportunity we would like to hear from you. Further details including application information can be accessed at www.feguild.info

For an informal discussion about the post please contact **Peter Davies** at peter_davies@aoc.co.uk

Closing date for applications is Sunday 10th March

Pre-selection interviews will be held on **Thursday 14th and Friday 15th March**

Final interviews will be held on the afternoon of **Monday 25th March**



Contracts Coordinator (Part time)

The Northern Racing College seeks to appoint a part time Contracts Coordinator with immediate effect. Applicants must have experience in

- Excellent knowledge of both EFA & SFA funding structures, processes and procedures from a training provider perspective including familiarities with LIS, LARA and the "Provider" Gateway.
- Excellent up to date knowledge of PICs management information system
- Up to date and extensive hands on experience of management information reporting and making funding claims
- Liaising with staff and funding agencies

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A selection of submissions will be published on the FE Week website. Our readers will vote for the winner, which will be announced on 29th March 2013

The competition is open to current apprentices only



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FE Week Sudoku challenge

5	3	9				6	7	
					7		8	5
			2				4	
		7	1					
2			3		9			4
					8	5		
	1				3			
4	2		6					
	9	3				4	1	8

Difficulty:
EASY

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

Solutions: Next week

								8
		4		1	9		5	
		6	2				1	
	2		3					
3			8		4			9
					1		6	
	7				3	4		
	6		7	9		1		
8								

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Last Week's solutions

4	1	7	8	9	6	5	3	2
2	6	3	4	1	5	8	7	9
5	8	9	7	2	3	6	4	1
8	9	6	5	4	7	2	1	3
7	5	1	2	3	8	9	6	4
3	4	2	9	6	1	7	8	5
9	2	8	3	7	4	1	5	6
6	3	5	1	8	2	4	9	7
1	7	4	6	5	9	3	2	8

Difficulty:
EASY

5	1	3	7	4	8	6	9	2
9	8	4	1	2	6	7	3	5
2	6	7	9	3	5	1	8	4
7	5	6	8	1	2	3	4	9
1	2	9	3	7	4	5	6	8
3	4	8	5	6	9	2	1	7
4	9	2	6	5	3	8	7	1
6	7	5	4	8	1	9	2	3
8	3	1	2	9	7	4	5	6

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

FE Week mini-mascot

Follow the adventures of *FE Week's* biggest and smallest fan!



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